

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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SUBJ: CAMEROON ON EVE OF FORMAL INAUGURATION OF OIL PRODUCTION

REFS: (A) 77 DOUALA A-019 (B) 77 DOUALA A-044 (C) 77 STATE
299209 (D) STATE 003508 (ALL REFS NOTAL)

1. TOP ELF-SEREPKA OFFICIALS IN DOUALA HTXE CONFIRMED THAT CAMEROON PRESIDENT AHIDJO WILL PARTICIPATE IN A LOW- KEY CEREMONY AT THE RIO DEL REY OFFSHORE OIL RIG SITE TO MARK THE INAUGURATION OF OIL PRODUCTION IN CAMEROON. THE CEREMONY IS EXPECTED TO TAKE PLACE ON FEBRUARY 1 OR 2, DEPENDING ON THE PRESIDENT'S SCHEDULE. ELF-SEREPKA DIRECTOR GENERAL J.C. VAUCHEZ STATED THAT THE PROCEEDING WILL BE SO LOW KEY THAT AHIDJO WILL LAND AT THE OLD DOUALA AIRPORT (NOW USED BY THE MILITARY) AND WILL PROCEED WITHOUT ANY FANFARE DIRECTLY TO THE OIL RIG SITE BY HELICOPTER. ONCE ALL PARTICIPANTS ARRIVE AT THE SITE, THEY MAY HAVE A FEW
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GLASSES OF CHAMPAGNE, BUT NO OTHER FUNCTIONS ARE SCHEDULED ANYWHERE ELSE IN CAMEROON TO CELEBRATE THIS IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT.

2. ALTHOUGH LOW-KEY TO SOUTSIDERS, ELF ITSELF IS PULLING OUT ALL STOPS IN TERMS OF FRENCH REPRESENTATION. TOP OFFICIALS OF ELF AND ITS PARENT COMPANY AQUATAINE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF AQUITAINE ON DOWN ARE EXPECTED TO BE IN DOUALA AND VICINITY ABOUT TEN

DAYS BEFORE THE INAUGURATION. VAUCHEZ FELT THAT THE PRESENCE OF SUCH A LARGE NUMBER OF HIGH-RANKING ELF PEOPLE WOULD NOT AROUSE MUCH SPECULATION AMONG THE UNINFORMED PUBLIC, FOR IT IS TRADITIONAL FOR THESE FRENCH OFFICIALS TO UNDERTAKE THEIR BOONDOGGLES DURING THE COLD MONTHS IN EUROPE.

3. THE ELF-SEREPCA OIL RIG SITE CONSISTS OF THE RIG ITSELF AND AN OLD 90,000 TON TANKER (THE S.S. FAKO) WHICH HAS BEEN MODIFIED TO PROVIDE A GENERATING PLANT FOR ELECTRIC POWER, EXPANDED QUARTERS FOR THE PLATFORM CREW, STORAGE SPACE FOR RIG EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES, AND, OF COURSE, CRUDE OIL STORAGE SPACE. INITIAL PRODUCTION IS EXPECTED TO BE 8,000-9,000 B/D. JOHN JACKSON, SHELL DIRECTOR GENERAL, STATED THAT THE PRESENCE OF THE TANKER WAS AN EXCELLENT MEANS OF KEEPING OIL PRODUCTION LOW KEY, FOR NO ONE ON SHORE SAW THE PRODUCTS OF THE OIL ENDEAVOR. ALL THE CRUDE OIL WAS KEPT RIGHT IN THE TANKER. ACCORDING TO JACKSON, ONE INDICATION THAT PRODUCTION HAS BEEN FAIRLY LOW SO FAR IS THAT ELF-SEREPCA HAS NOT YET FILLED UP THE 90,000 TON STORAGE CAPACITY OF THE OLD TANKER, EVEN THOUGH IT HAS BEEN TAKING CRUDE SINCE MID-NOVEMBER 1977. THERE WAS SOME FEELING THAT A NICE TOUCH TO THE INAUGURATION CEREMONY MIGHT BE TO HAVE A SECOND TANKER OFFLOAD THE CRUDE AND DELIVER THE FIRST LOAD OF CAMEROONIAN CRUDE TO A REFINERY. OFFICIALS IN THE MINISTRY

OF ECONOMY AND PLAN APPARENTLY PREFER NOT TO INVOLVE AN EXPORT TANKER, FOR THEY REALIZED THAT IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO COORDINATE THE SCHEDULE OF THE PRESIDENT AND THAT OF A TANKER THAT MIGHT BE IN THE VICINITY. JACKSON ALSO STATED THAT THE RIO DEL REY CRUDE WAS DESCRIBED BY THESE OFFICIALS AS OF "VERY GOOD QUALITY" AND LIKE "LIGHT NIGERIAN LIGHT" CRUDE.

4. M. MANDENGUE, DIRECTOR OF EXPLORATION FOR ELF-SEREPCA, STATED THAT THE WELLS LOCATED SO FAR BY HIS COMPANY COULD EVENTUALLY PRODUCE 400,000 TONS PER YEAR. HE ALLOWED THAT THIS DID NOT ACCOUNT FOR FUTURE FINDS BY OTHER COMPANIES IN THEIR AREAS. JACKSON OF SHELL WAS A LITTLE MORE PESSIMISTIC AND FELT THAT THE MAXIMUM THAT COULD BE PRODUCED FROM ALL CAMEROON FIELDS WOULD BE 500,000 TONS.

5. OTHER COMPANIES ARE CONTINUING THEIR EXPLORATION EFFORTS AND ONE COMPANY WHICH PULLED OUT IS EXPECTED TO RETURN. IT IS PRACTICALLY A FOREGONE CONCLUSION IN DOUALA THAT Pecten OIL COMPANY WILL RETURN IN A BIG WAY AND CONCENTRATE ON THE LOKELE CONCESSION, IN WHICH THEY HOLD 80 PERCENT INTEREST. THE AMERICAN IN Pecten's OFFICE HAS STATED THAT SHE EXPECTS Pecten TO COME BACK IN MAY 1978; ELF-SEREPCA DIRECTOR-GENERAL VAUCHEZ FELT THAT THEY WOULD BE BACK IN TWO MONTHS. VAUCHEZ'S OPINION WAS SHARED BY A SENIOR AMERICAN OIL DRILLER IN DOUALA UNDER CONTRACT TO

ELF-SEREPKA.

6. AT THE MOMENT, CAMEROON IS ORCHESTRATING THE PUBLICITY

ABOUT ITS OIL PRODUCTION AT THE PIANISSIMO LEVEL AND WILL
PROBABLY CONTINUE TO DO SO UNTIL THEY KNOW HOW MUCH OIL THEY
REXLLY HAVE. THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT WANT THE WESTERN AND ARAB
COUNTRIES PROVIDING AID TO BELIEVE THAT CAMEROON HAS CROSSED OVER
INTO THE CAMP OF THE OIL PRODUCING NATIONS. THUS THE STRESS ON
THE "MODEST" RESERVES AND PRODUCTION WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE
FOR SOME TIME.

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